



# Visiting Scholars Series

## *Research Brief*

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## **Closing the Student Achievement Gap by Closing the Teaching Quality Gap: Reframing the Debate**

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America's public schools have always served top students well. In some respects, schools have been well designed and reasonably funded to support the one in five students thought to be ready for demanding academic pursuit and the nation's "smart" jobs. However, demographic and economic imperatives now demand a challenging curriculum for virtually all students—one that requires everyone to research, think, analyze, write, and perform. Thirty years ago, individuals who did not succeed in school could still find a relatively decent job. No longer. The currency of today's global economy is knowledge. This requires new forms of schooling and teachers who have the skills and supports to ensure that all students attain high academic standards.

Unfortunately, achievement gaps—especially between whites and minorities and between the poor and the wealthy—persist. By some accounts, over the last 10–15 years this education divide has grown (Ferguson 2004). No wonder. Poverty and education are tightly intertwined, and some 16 percent—almost 12 million—of all U.S. children live in poverty, with a disparate impact on black and Hispanic youth. These numbers have remained steady for 25 years, but have spiked more recently (National Center on Poverty 2003). Researchers have pointed to the facts that—

- Poor children enter school with lower reading levels and relatively few vocabulary words (Lee and Burkham 2002).
- Minority and low-income students, because of economic exigencies, are far more likely to move from school to school, hindering their academic growth (Barton and Coley 1992).
- Summer educational opportunities afforded to higher-income students have been shown to produce some of the highest spikes in the achievement gap (Entwisle and Alexander 1992).

Out-of-school factors play a huge role in defining and reifying achievement gaps. Yet, over the last 15 years research has consistently identified the inextricable link between teacher quality and student achievement (Ferguson 1991, Sanders and Rivers 1996, Greenwald et al. 1996). Recently, three separate research studies have shown that National Board Certified Teachers actually produce greater student achievement gains than their counterparts, and do so especially for low-achieving students (Cavalluzzo 2004, Goldhaber and Anthony 2004, Vandevoort et al. 2004). Other recent studies have pointed to the success of some elementary schools in closing achievement gaps, only to have gains evaporate in middle and high school (see, for example, Richards and Sheu 1992). These data suggest that teachers—and the schools in which they teach—matter for improving student achievement. Today, hardly anyone from any political perspective denies the fact that ensuring a qualified teacher for every child is one of the most critical strategies for improving our nation’s public schools and closing achievement gaps.

Over the last several months, the National Education Association has commissioned several papers that have highlighted the importance of teachers and teaching in closing achievement gaps. Ferguson (2005) noted the critical role teachers play in making sure students understand their lessons and reading assignments while also pointing out that minority students are far more likely *not* to identify with their teachers’ classroom presentations, assignments, and text. (Ferguson shows that “half of black and Hispanic students reported ‘completely’ understanding only half or less of their teachers’ lessons, and understanding ‘very well’ only half or less of what they read for school. In contrast, among white students these same percentages hovered around 25–30 percent.”) He found also that for students of color the extent to which their teachers “encourage” them academically (as opposed to just demanding that they achieve) has a significant impact on their performance. Ladson-Billings (2005) noted the problems associated with “the pedagogy of poverty,” which include the well-researched fact that poor students and students of color have *less* access to high-quality curricula and are taught in schools focused more “on order and regimentation rather than on learning.”

Short (2005) pointed to the enormous growth of second language learners in America’s public schools and the scant preparation and professional development our nation’s teachers have in working with such students. She asserted that most teacher presentations, textbooks, and assignments confound many second language learners, and that if teachers possessed certain English as a Second Language pedagogies—particularly sheltered instruction techniques for content teachers and knowledge of linguistic and cultural contexts—they could more readily ensure that all their students can achieve.

Ingersoll’s (2005) large-scale research studies have made it clear that teacher shortages are not due to the insufficient supply of qualified teachers but to a “revolving door”—where large numbers of qualified teachers depart their jobs long before retirement. Teacher salaries are important in retaining teachers, but they are not the entire story. His data point to the fact that particularly in high-poverty schools teachers often leave due to “inadequate support from the school administration, too many intrusions on classroom teaching time, student discipline problems and limited faculty input into school decision making.” High-quality induction programs, where novices enjoy reduced teaching loads and access to expert mentors in their assigned teaching area, have been shown to increase teacher retention substantially (Ingersoll and Smith 2003).

Johnson's (2005) research on what supports new teachers and why new teachers remain bolsters Ingersoll. Working conditions matter, but don't necessarily mean smaller class sizes. Johnson's study of 50 Massachusetts teachers revealed how they had virtually no access to curricula for assigned subjects, which severely impacted retention. New teachers, in order to be successful and remain, sought a reasonable load with in-field assignments, high-quality professional development linked to what they were teaching, and support from more expert colleagues.

Recent research by the Southeast Center for Teaching Quality (2005) has revealed that teacher working conditions matter a great deal for student achievement. Drawing on large-scale surveys in both North and South Carolina, we found that teacher ratings of school leadership, professional development, empowerment, and time were all closely linked to whether or not schools made academic gains. In North Carolina, for every one point increase (on a one-to-five scale of satisfaction) on the survey's leadership domain average, middle schools were 6.7 times more likely to have made Adequate Yearly Progress according to the NCLB formula.

Researchers make compelling arguments and, one would assume, their data would oblige policymakers, practitioners, and the public to think and act differently when it comes to improving teaching quality and closing achievement gaps. Building off the 1996 National Commission on Teaching and America's Future report, progress on creating a more well-developed teaching profession has been made. Universities, pushed in part by the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education, made marked improvements in teacher preparation. The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, and its rigorous performance assessments used to identify accomplished teachers, have prompted higher-quality university-based coursework and school district professional development experiences for teachers. Many more states have developed and enforced more rigorous teaching standards, and all states assess teachers—at least those teachers who enter through traditional routes—in some way before they begin teaching. By the 2000 school year, almost 80 percent of teachers reported having a mentor or participating in an induction program—a two-fold increase since 1990.

However, many of these nascent efforts have since screeched to a halt. Little has changed in terms of ensuring that poor students and students of color have access to qualified teachers, no matter how “qualified teachers” is defined. For example—

- As the demand for teachers has escalated and school funding inequities have grown, many urban and rural districts have hired a growing number of unqualified teachers (i.e., those on some form of emergency permit or waiver who lack formal preparation for teaching) (Esch et al. 2004).
- Due primarily to the lack of investment in clinical training and tight connections with K–12 schools, most teacher education programs do not adequately prepare new teachers for challenging urban and rural schools (Cochran-Smith et al. 2003).

While growing numbers of states—now 37 states—test a teacher's content knowledge before a teacher begins teaching, only 25 states have the same requirements for “short-cut” alternative certification recruits (Skinner 2005). Other examples include—

- Only 24 states assess the subject-specific pedagogical skills of new teachers and only 13 assess teaching performance—either through a portfolio, classroom observations, or videotaped lessons—prior to licensure (Skinner 2005).
- Less than 1 percent of novice teachers have access to high-quality induction programs. Ingersoll and Smith's (2003) analysis of 1999–2000 school and staffing data revealed that less than 1 percent of the nation's new teachers had an induction program that included a helpful mentor in the field, seminars for beginning teachers, common planning time, collaboration with other teachers on instruction, an external teacher network, supportive communication with administrators, and reduced number of preparations.
- Most professional development is still best characterized by one- or two-shot workshops that rarely support long-term changes in teaching practices (Miles et al. 2005).
- Teachers are still not paid well, compared to other similarly trained and college-educated professionals. And, in spite of a few exceptions, most teacher unions and administrators still get bogged down when it comes to finding new ways to pay teachers more and differently (AFT 2003).
- The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards has grown, and there are now 40,000 NBCTs nationwide. However, these accomplished teachers are less likely to be found in high-poverty, high-minority schools, and few districts, if any, have figured out how to systematically utilize them for improving schools and closing achievement gaps (Berry and King 2005).

Our nation has made too little progress improving the teaching profession. While no policymaker, school reformer, or researcher denies the importance of teachers and teaching in closing achievement gaps, consensus on how to best prepare, recruit, support, and pay teachers is ephemeral. The tough financial and political decisions don't get made. Momentum created in the 1990s by the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future and its state and local partnerships has faded. Another blue-ribbon panel, The Teaching Commission, has ascended, with some of the same issues on the table, but with a slightly different bent and comprising different policymakers and business leaders. Efforts to improve teaching have been stymied by an impasse pitting progressives against conservatives and traditional educators against reformers.

### **The teacher and teaching quality debates**

All too often, policymakers and practitioners get caught up in vitriolic debates over how to improve teachers and teaching quality. As a result, little gets done. Such debates evoke a larger set of contentious issues clearly defined by two opposing camps—those who seek to deregulate teaching and those who seek to professionalize it (Cochran-Smith and Fries 2001). As put by two researchers (Cochran-Smith and Fries 2002), each camp has “differing notions of evidence, fairness, results, progress, public benefit, the American way, and other key ideas,” and their respective ideologies are driven by ideas, ideals, values, and assumptions about the purposes of schooling, the social and economic future of the nation, and the role of public education in a democratic society.” Both camps articulate a view of teacher quality and what will be best or needed for students, who are the ultimate beneficiaries of efforts to transform teaching.

For deregulation advocates—who believe that student learning and teachers should be measured only by standardized tests—extensive teacher preparation is unnecessary and costly. These critics have claimed that teaching does *not* rest “on a reasonably stable body of knowledge based on high-quality, replicable research accepted by almost everyone in the field and systematically imparted by its training institutions,” and that much of teacher education has been built on the “ideologies and enthusiasms of the faculty” and not on “anything (one) could call science” (Education Commission of the States 2000). As such, deregulation advocates often consider a qualified teacher to be someone with “a solid general education, who possesses deep subject area knowledge, and who has no record of misbehavior” (Fordham Foundation 1999). By opening up the teacher labor market and making it easier for smart people to enter classrooms and then paying them more only for the value-added statistical gains in standardized student achievement scores, students will be more likely to be taught by effective teachers. (Most in the deregulation camp call for recruiting teachers with higher verbal scores on standardized tests, such as the Scholastic Aptitude Test or Graduate Record Exam.)

Drawing on what has been accurately described (Wilson et al. 2001) as a “thin” teacher education research base, deregulation advocates call for dismantling teacher education and state licensing, and replacing them with an array of pedagogy-free, alternative certification programs (currently available in 43 states) and a subject-specific, multiple-choice teacher test designed to provide the sole identification of a “highly qualified” teacher as defined by the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act. These efforts, framed most notably by the U.S. Department of Education’s investment in the American Board for the Certification of Teacher Excellence, are largely based on the assumption that teachers can learn what little they need to know about the teaching process while on the job. For deregulation advocates, the NBPTS assessments are discounted because they are viewed as being soft on testing teachers’ subject matter knowledge.

For advocates of professionalism, who believe teaching is as much about social justice and empowerment as academic attainment, short-cut routes into teaching and assessing teachers solely on a simple subject matter test (and not on teaching performances) are antithetical to the needs of diverse students who must have access to well-prepared and well-supported teachers. Turning teaching into a true profession is based in part on the growing knowledge base of how humans learn (Bransford et al. 1999), as well as on new advancements in the teaching of reading, math, and second language learners and on how teachers need to assess students and use data and evidence to improve instruction (Allington 2002, Palinscar 1984, Ball 2003, Newmann 1996, Yasin 2000). With the dramatic growth of student diversity, issues of cultural competency have become a teacher quality centerpiece for advocates of building the teaching profession.

Professionalism advocates call for higher salaries (with some differentiation in pay based on multiple criteria) and deeper investments in teacher preparation (with a great deal of focus on what a teacher knows before beginning to teach). For professionalism advocates, student test scores are inadequate proxies for teacher effectiveness, and such advocates have pressed for more complex and expensive measurement tools, such as National Board for Professional Teaching Standards advanced certification exams. Professionalism advocates do not resist alternative certification programs, but they do insist that teachers who enter teaching through these routes arrive prepared to teach and having met the same standards as other, more traditionally prepared teachers.

The debate between those advocating deregulation and those advocating professionalism often gets mired in the merits of various research studies, whether or not a particular investigation employed sufficient statistical controls and used the most up-to-date methodology, how policymakers should interpret effects sizes, and so forth. As Ferguson has noted (Archer 2002)—

In this game, where nobody has the definitive evidence, the person who ends up with the burden of proof loses... If you are someone who wants to claim that professional development programs in general make a difference, you might be right, but you don't have the evidence, so you lose.

The deregulationists have—much like Lakoff (2002) has suggested for the larger progressive versus conservative debates—reframed the issues using messages that easily resonate with the policy community. Lakoff, a University of California at Berkeley professor of linguistics and cognitive science, has unpacked “how progressives and conservatives think” in ways that have serious implications for how we think about teacher quality debates.

### **Moral politics in the teacher quality debate**

Lakoff claims that progressives and conservatives talk about the same moral issues but articulate and press for very different priorities. Both have very different worldviews. But conservatives are able to frame issues around a version of morality that enables them to manage the political discourse and action far more effectively than their progressive counterparts. For Lakoff, the progressive worldview is based on the nurturing parent family, where—

The world is basically good and can be made better and that one must work toward that. Children are born good; parents can make them better. Nurturing involves empathy, and the responsibility to take care of oneself and others for whom we are responsible.

On the other hand, the conservative worldview is based on the strict father model, where—

The world is dangerous and difficult and children are born bad and must be made good. The strict father is the moral authority who supports and defends the family, tells his wife what to do, and teaches his kids right from wrong. The only way to do that is through painful discipline—physical punishment that by adulthood will become internal discipline.

Progressive policies are built on a view of government that offers safety nets and opportunities, such as universal public education designed for the common good. Conservative policies are built on a view of government that maintains order, promotes self interest, and limits social programs (which only spoils people by “giving them things they haven't earned and keeping them dependent”). Public education is important, but many conservatives see it as a private, rather than a public good.

Moral politics are played out in terms of a message, a messenger, an audience, a medium, images, a context, and, especially, higher-level moral and conceptual frames. Conservatives, because of their think-tank investments and communications infrastructures, have convinced many lower- and middle-class constituents that tort reform and tax relief—with their imagery of countering greed and affliction—will best serve those constituents' interests. This is the case

even though tort reform and tax relief are far more likely to be offset by limitations placed on the justice system, on public education, and on other social services. Conservatives have become adept at marketing the strict father policy frame to the American public.

The framework Lakoff identifies and describes can also be seen at work in the education policy and teacher quality debates. The language of professionalism hones in on a teacher corps that knows and understands students and is *responsible* for a broad set of student learning outcomes. The language of deregulation hones in on a teacher corps that is innately smart, knows what is being taught to students, and must be held *accountable* for standardized achievement test score results. Of course the two do not have to be mutually exclusive, and, as I will suggest, they should not be. Yet, deregulationists are quite effective at framing these issues as if they are mutually exclusive, and at convincing policymakers that efforts to create a teaching profession based on a more complex set of teaching skills and focusing on teacher responsibilities will limit accountability and will do so at the expense of children and their parents.

In fact, given the (perceived) evidentiary teacher quality gridlock, deregulationists have been expert at managing the rhetoric surrounding the education debates, and they have been successful in defining ideas such as alternative certification and preparation, the primacy of subject matter knowledge, and paying teachers for value-added student achievement. Deregulationists have very effectively selected the language that frames their ideas, and they have created an infrastructure to communicate those ideas framed in that language to policymakers, practitioners, and the public. Professionalism advocates—

- Promote higher licensing standards, but such efforts get re-framed as more bureaucracy, red-tape, and control by the “education blob.”
- Promote more investments in teacher education (e.g., second language learners), but these efforts get re-framed as a disregard among teacher education programs for the role of subject matter knowledge in developing teacher expertise.
- Promote more complex teaching assessments, such as those used in the National Board Certification process, but such efforts get re-framed as “resistance” by teachers who don’t want to be held accountable for student results.

Deregulationists have painted a picture of a teaching community that does not have a pedagogical body of knowledge to spread and is mostly interested in paying themselves more money, irrespective of the academic payoff to students and schools. With growing awareness of how poorly other professions police themselves, it has not been difficult for deregulationists to make their moral pitch to a range of stakeholders and constituents.

Lakoff makes it very clear that while both the progressive and conservative worldviews have strong moral underpinnings, conservatives are more effective at articulating how their national policies are more closely related to traditional family values. This can also be seen in the education debate between those advocating deregulation and those advocating professionalization. Understanding audience is critical to framing message. That’s why an extremely important question involves determining where the American electorate stands. Lakoff’s analyses have led him to conclude that most people (i.e., voters) draw on both strict father and nurturing parent models across various aspects of their lives and apply them to

defining their politics and policies of choice. Lakoff claims that in recent elections polling data have suggested that about 35–40 percent of voters operate from the strict father model and another 35–40 percent operate from the nurturing parent model. Another 20–30 percent are *bi-conceptuals* who tend to be more progressive in their politics. They tend to be blue-collar workers who are strict fathers at home but are more nurturing when it comes to domestic policies (i.e., health care, social security, and public education). Others are upper-middle-class executives who are strict fathers in business dealings but nurturing at home. Such bi-conceptuals may see real problems in the public schools, but they do not believe that vouchers and doing away with teacher education are the solutions. They want fiscal accountability, but they also want good teachers who know both their subjects and students.

The fine-tuned and well-framed messages of conservative deregulationists have been extremely effective, but polling data clearly suggest that the American public wants more investment in public schools and in the teaching profession (Public Education Network 2003). More than 83 percent of Americans favor increased teacher salaries even if that means higher taxes, and 88 percent favor eliminating the practice of hiring unqualified teachers. Seventy-five percent oppose allowing people with bachelor's degrees to become teachers without preparation in the field of education (Education Testing Service 2002). Also, when asked about the qualities of good teachers, the vast majority of Americans overwhelmingly agree that good teachers are “well trained and knowledgeable about how to teach,” understand “how people learn,” and have the “ability to communicate with parents” (Recruiting New Teachers 2001).

The American electorate's top priority for improving public education is improving teacher quality (27 percent), and its lowest priorities are focusing solely on raising standardized test scores and letting for-profit companies run the schools (each at 2 percent) (Education Testing Service 2002). This does not mean that Americans don't expect teachers and other educators to be held accountable. Over 73 percent “favor strongly” or “favor somewhat” the ideas that students need to be tested and that teachers and administrators should be held accountable for student learning. Similarly, 86 percent favor the idea that incompetent teachers should be easier to fire, and 73 percent favor encouraging other professionals to enter teaching. Ninety-three percent favor testing teachers in both subject matter and teaching ability (Education Testing Service 2002).

Clearly, Americans favor elements of both the deregulationist and professionalism agendas. However, by a whopping 64 to 32 percent margin the American public “rejects lowering standards to hire more teachers” (Education Testing Service 2002). One opinion poll (The Teaching Commission 2005) shows public opinion supporting some elements of the deregulationist agenda, but clearly demonstrates that Americans recognize the complexity of measuring quality teaching. For example, 67 percent believe teachers ought to be paid extra for “gains in student achievement as measured by test results and other indicators.” However, the poll's commissioner advocates heavily for paying teachers according to value-added methodologies, and their report downplays a critical finding—only 35 percent of Americans believe the “standardized tests students currently take in [their] state accurately measure student achievement” (The Teaching Commission 2005).

To be sure, good teaching is all about student learning—and the value-added statistical methods being developed have many important applications, especially as they relate to teachers' professional development. However, Americans seem to know intuitively what some of our nation's best researchers have noted: standardized student achievement tests and current value-added methods used to judge teachers can be fraught with technical problems (Kane and Staiger 2001, Ballou 2002, Kupermintz 2003). After a two-year investigation of value-added methodology (McCaffrey et al. 2004), the RAND Corporation pointed to a number of additional technical problems. For example, the way value-added methodology controls for "context" may not be sufficient to precisely measure teacher effects; the models used may not properly distinguish teacher effects from other effects attributable to the school in which the teacher works. RAND researchers expressed concern about incomplete data, which arise in two particular areas: individual students over time and linking students to teachers. The researchers noted other problems, such as infrequent testing, a limited number of topics tested, and the way test scores are scaled. These may all be biasing estimated teacher effects, and this led researchers to conclude that, while the model is more sound than others currently in use for test-based accountability, "the research base is currently insufficient to support the use of value-added methods for high-stakes decisions (like performance pay)." Value-added methodology is a bright idea that has so dazzled its proponents that they have failed to ask themselves whether we really have the mechanisms to make it work.

However, education progressives—much like their counterparts in the larger national polity—have not been very good at developing, framing, and communicating their messages to the American electorate, an electorate that favors the moral and family values embedded in the professionalism agenda. These progressive moral and family values are ones that ensure caring, qualified, well-supported, and effective teachers for every student, and ensure that any system of teacher accountability is fair, reliable, and reflective of the larger goals of public education in American society. *Measuring student learning and teacher effectiveness solely with standardized tests and value-added methods is like measuring a person's health with only a thermometer and a sphygmomanometer.* Both are necessary, but neither is sufficient to understand and ensure overall health and well-being.

These polling data suggest that the American public wants to improve teaching quality by investing in the education profession. But the public's sentiments are not being expressed, as states lower teaching standards through alternative certification programs, turn a blind eye to whether or not teachers have the necessary teaching skills and cultural competencies necessary to teach all students effectively, and assess the complexity of teaching effectiveness using only standardized tests.

The teaching quality debates need to be informed by sound research and reliable data and driven by blue-ribbon commission reports that can elevate conversations and mobilize policymakers, practitioners, and the public. However, the voices of accomplished teachers often are missing in efforts to improve teaching quality and to make the case for teacher professionalism.

The public will not engage in debating the merits of one research study over another. Nor is it likely that the simpleminded bromides offered by policy reports can capture the realities of classroom life and the complexities of teaching. But the public will, given the right

circumstances, listen to teachers, who are more respected than legislators or policy wonks. In fact, based on a poll conducted in 2001, teaching is the public's second most respected profession, only a few percentage points behind the clergy. The public gives much lower marks to journalists, business leaders, legislators, and trade unionists (McCaffrey et al. 2004). I believe our nation's accomplished teachers must be at the forefront of any effort to reframe the education debates and to make the case for a kind of teaching profession that has morality and family values at its core.

### **Making the case for teacher professionalism**

In an analysis of the teaching quality debates a few years ago, *Education Week* suggested that there was "little disagreement" about what research reveals but "experts from different camps quickly part ways when it comes to how the data should be interpreted and how policymakers should respond." The article concluded that while there are studies that point to the characteristics of effective teachers what is missing are large-scale, controlled studies that can readily define how good teachers should be identified, prepared, developed, and paid (Archer 2002).

There is no question that more research on teacher education, teacher certification and licensing, and professional development is needed. But more research data alone will not be sufficient to make the case for teacher professionalism. As Lakoff notes (Powell 2003), reframing, not refuting, is the most important strategy.

Remember, don't just negate the other person's claims, reframe. You cannot win [the debate] just by stating the true facts and showing that they contradict your opponent's claims... The facts unframed will not set you free... Frames trump facts... because frames will stay and the facts will bounce off [of the voters or constituencies you are trying to win over].

The reframing must express fundamental progressive values such as strength and safety and protection as well as responsibility, fairness, community, and cooperation. Framing is not spin. Lakoff claims that tort law needs to be reframed as the public's last defense against irresponsible—if not downright immoral—corporate behavior that causes harm to the public. Similarly, I would suggest that short-cut alternative certification programs are also irresponsible. Many of the current alternative certification policies allow almost any adult to become "teachers" of children without having undergone any serious scrutiny whatsoever. Testing for teacher subject matter knowledge is important but should not be done without assessing whether or not a teacher can, in fact, teach. Teachers and other educators should be held responsible and accountable for student learning, but using standardized tests alone can actually harm children and limit educational opportunities for our nation's most vulnerable children. All teachers must be expected to meet high standards before they are allowed to teach, and all teachers need to be assessed along a number of dimensions—dimensions that accurately reflect the complexity of their very difficult jobs. Progressives must repeatedly articulate the moral basis for promoting the case for teacher professionalism.

Professionalism advocates need to be more forthright and aggressive about what is stake and what is behind the deregulationists' agenda. Relying solely on the labor market to fill teacher shortages will only continue to ensure that poor students and students of color are taught by

unqualified, inexperienced teachers. When California lowered class sizes in the late 1990s, it essentially moved to a market approach to teacher education and hiring. There were no real operative standards for accrediting education programs, and teaching standards were lowered. In a matter of a few years there were more than 30,000 uncredentialed teachers, 3,000 alternatively certified teachers, and ten times more under-prepared teachers in high-poverty schools (Education Commission of the States 2000). Why? By focusing just on testing teachers for subject matter knowledge and encouraging less-prepared teachers to enter and then leave teaching quickly, deregulationists succeed in their larger, conservative agenda, which is to keep teacher salaries low and limit the potential impact that highly professionalized teachers can have on what is taught—and how it is taught—in our nation’s public schools. Progressives need to make clear that economics and power, not morality and family values, are at the core of much of the deregulationist agenda.

The education community also needs to be honest with itself. The National Education Association and many others in the so-called education establishment must recognize that the political resistance to professionalism is not just because of economics and power politics, but also because the teaching community has not done enough to establish and enforce standards (including closing down poor schools of education) and has not been responsive to the academic and developmental needs of our nation’s most at-risk students. In order to move beyond the warring ideologies currently being waged and overcome the skepticism in the policy community to invest in teachers and teaching, the profession can no longer hold on to long-standing norms of egalitarianism and mediocrity among its ranks. In doing so, the professionalism movement must take on *some* of the flavor of the deregulationist agenda, but *never* depart from its focus on the family values of social justice and equity. The education community must work differently and advocate differently. Feathers will be ruffled as traditional teacher unionists, administrators, university faculty, and policymakers become challenged to think and act differently.

First, pay teachers more and differently. The public will invest more in teacher salaries if they know they are paying “good” teachers. The polling data are clear. Should this notion fly in the face of tradition, so be it. The profession has already begun the process of breaking up the lock-step salary schedule with the advent of incentives and rewards for National Board Certification. Professional compensation experiments, such as the one unfolding in Denver led by NEA union activist Brad Jupp, offer a powerful model to consider. Teachers will be paid more for being National Board Certified and for possessing knowledge and skills deemed important by the Denver school system, for teaching in hard-to-staff schools and positions, and for producing student learning gains using valid, reliable, and transparent methods.

Second, accomplished teachers must evaluate colleagues and supervise less-prepared novices. Peer review programs have made headway in some school communities, often led by union leaders like Adam Urbanski (AFT) and Mark Simon (NEA). There are some strong programs, but few and far between. The public needs to know that the teaching profession can and will police its own better than doctors and lawyers because of its unwavering focus on children.

Third, put pressure on universities, not just education schools, to really change. A great deal of what is known about teaching reading, about working effectively with second language learners,

or about developing the “cultural competence” necessary to teach in diverse school communities has yet to find its way into the curricula of many of our teacher education programs. Also, the arts and sciences faculty in many universities have not focused on how their subject matter needs to be taught so that prospective teachers can represent content knowledge in ways that are understandable to all public school students. The public needs to know the education community is willing to close down university preparation programs that do not pass muster.

Fourth, get beyond traditional teacher education versus alternative certification debates. Strong urban teacher preparation programs, such as those at UCLA, Stanford, and Boston College, must be held up as exemplars to policymakers, practitioners, and the public. Such programs are more expensive and faculty must be more aggressive in collecting and disseminating data that show that investing in more of the right kind of teacher education is cost effective. Granted, the line must be held on short-cut alternative certification programs allowing individuals to become independent teachers of record with only days or weeks of boot camp training. But the education community must be more accepting of high-quality alternatives, such as Chicago’s Academy for Urban Schools which attracts mid-career switchers by paying them to learn how to teach and to become a school-change agent in a year-long, social justice-oriented residency program.

Finally, focus on a new set of teacher working conditions—ones that have been shown to matter most for student achievement, not necessarily for the betterment of teachers. Weak school leadership, incoherent and simple-minded professional development, and the lack of teacher time form a triple-walled, reform-resistant barrier that blocks efforts to ensure teaching quality. The public needs to know that any efforts to improve teachers’ credentials and to pay teachers for teaching in hard-to-staff schools will be for naught if the dismal conditions under which most teachers work are not addressed and remedied. The truth is that many people want schools to be better and to have teachers who are more “highly qualified,” but they do not want those schools to look much different, and they do not want teachers to have working conditions that might empower them to become real leaders of reform.

Better-prepared teachers will not only cost more, but they will also demand more changes in the ways schools are organized and led. Redesigned schools, with more time for teachers to learn from one another and work more closely with students, will allow better-prepared teachers to be more effective. The public wants teachers who know their students and who know the communities in which they work. As some researchers have noted, “the effective urban teacher cannot be skilled in the classroom [without] skills and commitment to equity, access, and democratic participation” (Oakes et al. 2002). Most of the public wants schools that reflect progressive values of civic responsibility, fairness, and economic opportunities, and the public recognizes that they require better-prepared professional teachers. This notion of a *new teaching profession* is threatening to some deregulation advocates, but it is reflected in values that are deeply rooted in the minds and hearts of the majority of the American electorate. They have not heard the right messages from the right messenger.

Let’s start with some new language and new messages to reframe the debate.

1. To become a teacher without teacher education is like preparing for the World Series without tryouts, spring training, and coaching. Would *you* play first base without a glove?

2. Claiming a teacher is “highly qualified” with only a subject matter test is like claiming a doctor is “highly qualified” with only an anatomy test.
3. Paying teachers solely for their standardized test scores is like paying doctors solely for their mortality rates.
4. You can’t teach what you don’t know, but neither can you teach *whom* you don’t know.
5. Those who can, do. But those who can do *better*, teach.

Then let’s mobilize some new messengers—the voices of our most accomplished teachers whom the public most admires—to reframe the debate over teaching quality and how best to close our nation’s all-too-wide achievement gaps. Research and data are critical to this work. But research and data alone cannot be used to win the debate, only to reframe it. The education community must now find ways to build new messages for new messengers who can speak to the majority of Americans, people who hold traditional progressive values of strength, safety, competency, quality, care, responsibility, and justice, and who recognize that only *teacher professionals* can ensure that these values are represented in our public schools and imparted to our nation’s children.

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### **About Barnett Berry**

Barnett Berry is founder and president of the Southeast Center for Teaching Quality, based in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. The Center seeks, both regionally and nationally, to improve student learning by shaping policies through developing teacher leadership, building coalitions, and conducting practical research, both in the Southeast and across the nation. The Center seeks to put accomplished teachers at the center of school reform and of improving teaching and learning policies.

Dr. Berry's career includes teaching in an urban high school, working as a social scientist at the

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